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News: Platypus

- Recent research sheds light on a troubling situation related to water-dwelling animal, Platypuses (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*), following the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires in eastern Australia.

Platypus

- Platypus is a semi aquatic egg-laying mammal found in river systems in eastern Australia that includes Tasmania too. They are also referred to as the duck-billed platypus.
- It venomous mammal is endemic to eastern Australia.
- Its streamline body and a broad, flat tail are covered with dense waterproof fur, which provides excellent thermal insulation.
- They possess webbed feet for swimming and electroreceptors in their bills to find food in rivers and streams.
- Along with echidnas, Platypuses are grouped in a separate order of mammals known as monotremes, which are distinguished from all other mammals because they lay eggs.
- Also, males have a venomous spur on their ankles, a unique feature among mammals that they primarily used during the breeding season.
- While not lethal, the venom can cause severe pain and swelling in humans.

- The Platypus is the only living representative of its family i.e. Ornithorhynchidae.
- Ornithorhynchidae is the family of Monotremata, which comprises of Platypus and its extinct relatives.
- Monotremata is one of 3 main living groups of mammals. These mammals lay eggs instead of giving birth to young ones.
- Platypuses inhabit freshwater systems across a wide range of Australian landscapes.
- They can be found in tropical rainforest lowlands, plateaus of northern Queensland, and even cold, high-altitude regions like Tasmania and the Australian Alps.

Seasonality and Behavior

- Platypuses are active year-round, with a preference for twilight and nighttime activity.
- Platypuses spend much of their time in burrows along riverbanks or in rocky crevices and stream debris.

Feeding Habits

- Platypuses primarily feed at night on a wide variety of aquatic invertebrates.
- They feed on insect larvae, shrimps, swimming beetles, water bugs, tadpoles, worms, and more.

- Larger prey is taken individually and consumed after floating on the water surface.

Predators and Threats

- Predators include crocodiles, goannas, carpet pythons, eagles, and large native fish.
- Land-based predators like foxes, dogs, and dingoes may pose a threat.
- Ectoparasites, tick species, and fungal infections can also affect platypuses.
- The mammal is listed as “near threatened” on the Red List by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- Researchers from the University of New South Wales, Australia have found that the habitat of the platypus has shrunk by around 22 percent which is around 200,000 sq km since 1990, due to human intervention in the waterways, bad droughts and introduced predators.
- Platypus releases the milk through the pores of the skin.
- They're toothless animals.
- River Torrens is setting to host the return of Platypus, more than a century after it disappeared from here amid rising pollution levels.
- Australia has decided to build world's first platypus sanctuary near Sydney by 2022 which could be home to up to 65 platypuses.